

The Effect of Job Characteristics on Career Plateau of Human Resources

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to evaluate the effect of job characteristics on career plateau of human resources in Education Organization of the city of Masjed Soleiman. The research method is descriptive- survey and the statistical population are all staff of Education Organization of the city of Masjed Soleiman, 2000 individuals. The sample was estimated 322 individuals using simple random sampling and Cochran formula. In the present study, the field and library methods were used to collect data. Library method (including physical and digital) was done by means of note taking and the survey method was done using a questionnaire to collect data. The scale of Hackman and Oldham job characteristics and the scale of career plateau on Judith Bardoik path were used to design the questionnaire. The questionnaire validity was obtained by content validity and face validity and its reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha test. The conceptual model test was performed using regression analysis with SPSS software. Finally, every six hypothesis was confirmed. According to research findings, job characteristics have effects on career plateau of human resources in Education Organization of the city of Masjed Soleiman. Also, the effect of five job characteristics including lack of skill variety, low work identity, low importance of the job, the lack of independence and lack of feedback on career plateau of human resources was confirmed.

Keywords: job characteristics, career plateau, skill variety, work identity, work concept, feedback

Introduction

Our world is the world of organizations and people are its main driver of the wheel who give spirits to the organizations and fulfill the goals. Without people the organizations are meaningless and management becomes a fictitious issue (Griffin, 2009). Human resources are as the most important and the largest and most valuable asset of an organization, community and country, therefore that is why countries and organizations have invested on the valuable resources since long time ago and tried to fertile it, and those societies achieve progress and development who are able to thrive the hidden talents and forces (Vahedi et al., 2014). Career plateau is a trap on the way of the organization staff. 99% of the staff during their working lives is engaged with the phenomenon of career plateau (Manzari and Shojaei, 2007).

Career plateau occurs on the career development path when employees achieve to the point that there is no progress and cannot accept additional responsibility. According to Hackman and Oldham (1975) perceptions towards the environment and job duties, affected the staffs' attitudes in the fields of behavior, emotion and cognition. Job characteristics model of the researchers focused on job stimulus characteristics. (Vakili et al, 2009). In this Model five job characteristics with motivational role for employees include the work identity, independence, feedback, skill variety and importance of work. Work identity reflects individuals' awareness and participation in the completion of work as an integral part of a complete product. Job independence is associated to the

scope of the freedom to decide on jobs, job feedback to access the effectiveness of jobs, variety of skills to a variety of skills used to perform job assignments and finally, the importance of jobs for others and the importance of the role on others (Banai & Reisel, 2007). The concept of career plateau has been examined in the past two decades.

It is not a new phenomenon; however, what causes concern is the rapid spread of this phenomenon in many organizations. Many researchers believe that Career plateau has become an organizational critical issue that requires proper management to avoid the staffs' dissatisfaction. Due to changes in the environment, restructuring, downsizing (privatization) and employment, Career plateau probably will become one of important job issues in the next decade (Vahedi et al., 2014). The Career plateau refers to the feeling of failure and disappointment that people temporarily or permanently experience during their job. Career plateau is used as an introduction to many undesirable work consequences like low satisfaction, high stress, poor performance, low organizational commitment and increasing signs of blackmail and decisions for transmission. Career plateau as a potential caused discomfort among the staff because lack of steady job progress upward career is considered as a scale to measure the staffs' performance.

The staffs with Career plateau think that employers have quit their jobs. Career plateau is a part of working life on the path of job progress that refers to static condition in the process of individuals' job progress. Career plateau on the path of progress occurs when the staffs reach a point that there is no possibility to progress and do not accept additional responsibilities (Bashirbanayem et al, 2014).

Staffs often begin their careers with hope and expectation, especially for reaching the highest level in the organization and most of them care their progress, achieving power and highest responsibilities and rewards. However, workforces on the path of job progress get the point that the possibility of climbing the ladder of success reduces (Edgar et al, 2009). People give spirit and dynamism to the organization by undertaking administrative duties but each of the tasks and jobs in the organization has its own characteristics. Attitude of job characteristics in the job design was superior attitude in the 1970s and early 1980s (Griffin, 2009). According to the staffs a job is good that is not mundane and ordinary job and do not need thinking to do it; to some extent there is diversity and freedom in it; has a good social reputation and provide a working progress. According to these criteria, jobs should be designed so that those staffs who want more responsibility, participation, and participation in decision-making and development in the organization, have the ability to achieve these goals. (Beik Zadeh et al, 2011). Career plateau creates inefficiency and lack of results in the company or organization or may provide an opportunity for new challenges or an assessing objective and the path of life (Salehi and Alipoor, 2010). According to career plateau and studying effective and associated factors construction and presenting strategies for preventing and overcoming its effects can have a valuable contribution to the staffs' health in Education Organization of city of Masjed Soleiman and develop better organizational goals. Managers and employees can also take appropriate measures to reduce career plateau and avoid the staffs' adverse consequences of job problem.

Review of literature

Job characteristics

According to Hackman and Oldham (1976), the types of skills required, the possibility of identifying work with tangible results, working range, independence and efficiency are the characteristics of the activity that could affect people's attitudes towards their jobs because with these characteristics, people feel they are doing a great job and take responsibility for the results of their work. Hackman and Oldham determine these feelings because of their impact on the attitudes

and work behaviors as mental modes. Therefore, these variables can influence on motivation, satisfaction, performance, absenteeism, drop-out rates and the quality of work. There are at least seven theories on job characteristics. Fortunately, they have a lot in common; for example, the theory of health motivation belonging to Herzberg's and research conducted on the need to achieve success, both were among the theories of job characteristics. It must be remembered that Herzberg said that if the type of job can lead to success, reputation, responsibility, and such things it will cause an increase in workers' or staffs' job satisfaction. McClelland proved that those who achieve lots of opportunities have great performance and accept many responsibilities. The three theories about the characteristics of the jobs include the theory of work documents, the patterns of job characteristics and the patterns of social information processing (Robbins, 2009). Model of job characteristics to determine the interaction between job characteristics and individual differences were developed and affect people's satisfaction, motivation and productivity in the workplace. This model of planning and implementing changes is useful to design jobs. The most important characteristics of the jobs are in connection with its application to design jobs. Studies on job design indicate that the importance of job, reduces the staffs' mobility and absenteeism and increases job satisfaction, enhances production quality and considering job characteristics in designing jobs as a useful tool for the development of ergonomics programs to improve the physical conditions of work and its results, increasing motivation and reducing work-related injury, have great benefits for organizations and their employees (Kasi and Robbins, 2008). Richard Hackman and Lawler (1971) believed that mental and motivational characteristics, plays an important role on the person's reaction to the job. Using motivational theories they proved that the individuals stimulated through high-level needs such as self-discovery and growth, demand complex jobs and are ambitious (Manzari et al., 2008). Regarding the staffs' motivation factors and their needs and considering individual differences of each employee is one of the most important factors in labor productivity which can be achieved and is one of the key conditions to achieve the goal of stimulating and motivating people to do the work they are doing (Grant et al., 2010). Hackman and Oldham introduced job characteristics identifying questionnaire to test the theory of job characteristics. The questionnaire measures people's perception of job characteristics, different psychological states, and personal and work consequences and desperate needs for growth (Griffin, 2009). According to Hackman and Oldham sensitive psychological states form the main core of the theory. They defined sensitive psychological states as follow:

- *The significance of the work*: the rate of significance, importance and richness of the work that a person has experienced in practice.
- *Take the responsibility of the results of the work*: the rate of an individual's responsibility and accountability of the consequences of what he has done.
- *Awareness of the results*: the rate of an individual's ongoing awareness of how to do tasks effectively. If employees experience mental states enough it can be expected to have good feeling about themselves and have a good deal with their jobs (Griffin, 2009).

According to this model, each job can be in the form of five main the following:

Variety of skills: Jobs should include a variety of tasks so that a person can take advantage of a variety of skills and abilities or in other words it can be called the degree to which employees perform a wide range of tasks (Pasha and Khodadadi, 2008).

The significance of the task (work identity): Job tasks are defined in such a way that the work is certain from beginning to end for employees and the person has a complete picture of their job duties and to be considered an important part of the work that is having a job that can be recognized as a separate unit (Jane and Teryandis, 2002).

The importance of tasks: the rate of importance that each job has and sensitive effects they have on people's work and jobs.

Independence and authority at work: Limits in work scheduling to determine the procedures having independence and freedom of action.

Feedback: jobs should be designed so that it could give employees clear and direct information about the effectiveness of the results and work performance.

The first three dimensions lead to the identity of (the significance of) the job and the fourth dimension is about results and the last dimension is to understand the actual results of work activities that the five aspects are summarized in the motivational potential index formula (Mueller and Fitzgerald, 1985). According to the results of the investigation, in general it can be briefly stated those who are engaged to work with major characteristics, are more satisfied and are more motivated and compared to those who are engaged in such activities are more efficient. Job feature makes the person mentally be in the best situation, such spirits can affect his performance (Senobari and Rezaei, 2010). Overall, the redesign of job characteristics should be viewed as a bilateral phenomenon that from one side help employees meet their needs and from other side allows organizations to increase their productivity and efficiency and better compete with its competitors. However, in the absence of an environment where each individual can easily express best efforts, the experience of redesigning jobs will fail (Keshtidar, 2002).

Staff progress path

Job progress path is a hierarchy of jobs that a person can acquire them during their working lives. Michael Driver, as a result of his research states: job progress path hierarchy, is very similar to the views of employees. According to the driver, the individuals who chose such a pattern intend to pave the ladder in the hierarchy of organizational authority. The model can be seen among corporate executives and university professors; they begin from the first steps in the organization and gradually achieve responsibilities, authority and more money (Qelich Lee, 1998). Although the metaphor of the ladder of career path was taken from the workers (in the mine), today movement to the top of the ladder means success in all individuals, career path is defined as the stages of individual's work-related attitudes and behaviors in a person's lifetime. On the other hand, the management of career path includes contributing to form career paths, not only by interested people, but the managers in organizations formally and informally (Beheshtifar, 2010). Complete recognition of each individual's development path needs exploring the mental and physical aspects. Mental aspects include the promotion of values, character and motivation that vary over time and its objective aspects such are things as career choice, their positions, special skills, and so on (Gashtegar, 2000).

Job characteristics models

Since the attempts of any individuals are due to their motivation and satisfaction, Motivation and satisfaction of each individual is an important prerequisite to do the job effectively. Job satisfaction is an essential condition for the presence and work of an individual in the organization; this is why the important role of job satisfaction is in increasing productivity, commitment to the organization, ensuring the physical and mental health, learning new skills, accelerating to learn new job skills jobs and increasing individual morality (Mrugank and Ashwin, 2005). A large number of researchers have suggested that job enrichment is one way to enhance performance and job satisfaction. Job enrichment is to search improved performance and employee's satisfaction by widening the scope of activities and more opportunities for success and personal growth in the employee's job. In other words, job enrichment can be used as an organizational intervention designed to restore jobs with the aim of a making the individuals' jobs more challenging, motivating

and satisfying (Iraji Rad, 2008). Enrichment theory in many parts is based on Hackman and Oldham job characteristics. This model suggests that job characteristics such as variety of skills, the identity of the job, freedom of action in work, and feedback are associated with motivation and job satisfaction. The first three dimensions lead to the identity of (the significance of) the job and the fourth dimension is about results and the last dimension is to understand the actual results of work activities that the five aspects are summarized in the motivational potential index formula. The motivational potential achieves by multiplying the average of the first three dimensions (occupational diversity, job identity and importance of the job) freedom of action in work and feedback. This model suggests that higher level of motivational potential of individuals' job, the more motivation and job satisfaction (Faraj et al, 2008).

Plateau (stasis) in the job process

Plateau in job process in one side is psychological and in other side is due to environmental factors and interactions between person and organization. Another point of this issue is not limited in a specific community and it is an international process involves different job and organizational environments. Fernandez study showed that a plateau in career path is a common phenomenon in organizations that creates problems in staff morale and has impact on the productivity of organizations. Extensive integration, structural renovations, miniaturization, slow modernization and reducing the organizational positions which in turn reduces the chance and the opportunity to hierarchical movement are severely limited and in most cases it means the creation of plateau spirit in the career path. Furthermore, failure to meet the qualifying conditions, lack of intrinsic motivation in obtaining jobs, stress and job burnout and etc. are the factors creating plateau spirit in career path. By creating this spirit, the first question that comes to that person's mind, is that does he want to stay for the rest of their service life in the organizational position? With such confusion one feels that the symptoms of stress and fatigue appear and tries to be in harmony with the aspirations of the current situation, even though the current position with an uncertain future are not more interest more interesting (Singer, 2001).

The theoretical framework of research

Research literature reflects the impact of job characteristics on removing the staffs' career plateau variables in other words, the variables including job characteristics, lack of skill variety, low task identity, less importance of jobs, lack of independence, lack of feedback re effective on the career plateau variables. The results of the study by Michel Tremblay and Eileen Reaper (1998) showed that mental career plateau, job enrichment potential, role ambiguity and participation in decision-making are related to several individual behaviors and attitudes. Job characteristics can be used to limit the negative consequences associated with removing career plateau (Tremblay and Roger, 1998). From the dimensions of the job characteristics, lack of ability and individual skills cause career plateau. Having ability and skills means a person has an individual professional level to perform a particular activity, and also has a general individual tolerance. Therefore, the ability and skills are characteristics that are not directly visible, but visible only when people work, do their duties and responsibilities (Mayasari, 2009).

Regarding the the bonus system, some experts like Nelson believe that the percentage of annual payment to individuals with high-performance and to individuals with low-performance causes organizational plateau; therefore, people see that (high-performance, low performance and the boundary between the two) have no difference in payment. Career plateau occurs here. When plateau in learning and individual attempts occur it leads to individual stagnation and prevents persons from the improvements (Khanifar, 2006). Failure to meet the qualifying conditions, lack of intrinsic motivation in Jobs is considered as the factors creating spirit plateau in the career path. By

creating this spirit, the first question that comes to that person's mind, is that does he want to stay for the rest of their service life in the organizational position? With such confusion one feels that the symptoms of stress and fatigue appear and tries to be in harmony with the aspirations of the current situation, even though the current position with an uncertain future are not more interest more interesting (Khanifar, 2006). In relation to lack of the importance of content and career plateau dimensions some experts believe that career plateau is not necessarily associated with hierarchy positions. For development opportunities in addition to rank and title, increasing jobs and responsibilities are critical variables as well. Lack of various, competitive and new activities without the possibility of development or learning activity without moving can cause career plateau. Sometimes the amount of work in existing business units increases and consequently work is not done properly and efficiently (Vahedi et al., 2014). Richard Hackman and Lawler (1971) believed that psychological and motivational characteristics play an important role on how the person reacts against the job. They proved that people motivated through high levels needs such as self-discovery and growth, would like complicated jobs (Manzari, et al, 2008). Enrichment theoretical foundation in many parts is based on Hackman and Oldham job characteristics. This model suggests that job characteristics such as variety of skills, the identity of the job, freedom of action in work, and feedback are associated with motivation and job satisfaction. Bardoyek believes that there should be a difference between three types of career plateau and he included the three following factors: 1) structural factors of career plateau; 2) content factors of career plateau; 3) biological factors of career plateau. This study focused on independent variable of job characteristics and the dependent variable of human resources plateau and their effects. Conceptual model of the study is based on the theory of job characteristics by Hackman and Oldham and the theory of career plateau in the career path by Judith Bardoyek.

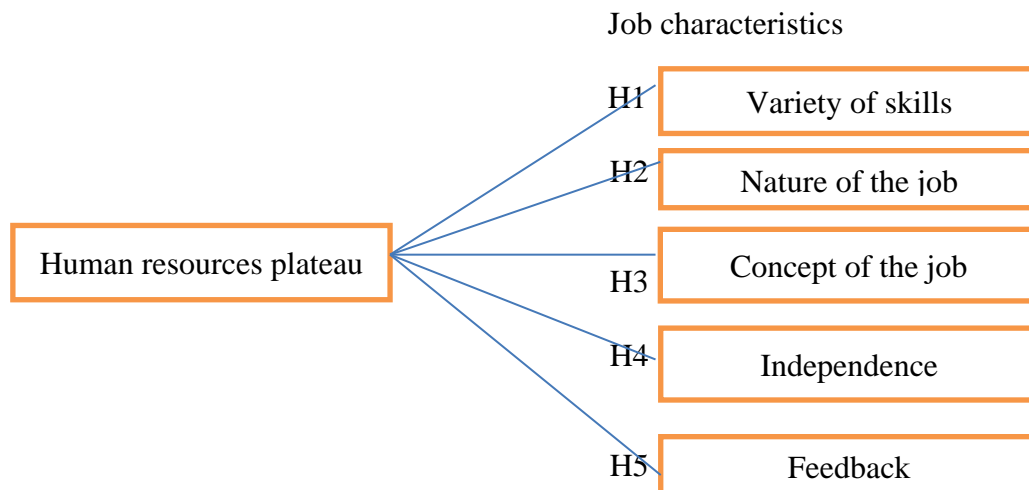


Figure 1: Research conceptual model

Research hypotheses

According to the conceptual model of research, main and secondary research hypotheses are as follows:

Main hypothesis: job characteristics have impact on the human resources plateau.

Secondary hypothesis

H1: lack of variety of skills has impact on the human resources.

H2: low identity of the job has impact on the human resources.

H3: concept of the job (less importance of the job) has impact on the human resources.

H4: lack of independence has impact on the human resources.

H5: lack of feedback has impact on the human resources.

Methodology

The current study is applied in terms of the goal and descriptive (non-experimental) and field study in terms of gathering data. This research was also carried out like a survey that one of its most important benefits is the ability to generalize results. The data analysis was performed using SPSS 18 statistical software. The statistical populations are all staff of Education Organization of the city of Masjed Soleiman, 2000 individuals. The sampling method used is unlimited potential sampling design (random). In this study among the staff of Education Organization of the city of Masjed Soleiman through potential unlimited method from the limited statistical population, sample size (n), was estimated based on the Cochran formula.

$$n = \frac{NZ_{\alpha/2}^2 pq}{\delta^2(N-1) + Z_{\alpha/2}^2 pq} \quad (1)$$

$$n = \frac{N \times t^2 \times p \times q}{d^2 \times (N-1) + t^2 \times p \times q} = \frac{2000 \times 1/96^2 \times 0/5 \times 0/5}{0/05^2 \times (2000-1) + 1/96^2 \times 0/5 \times 0/5} = 322$$

By regarding the error rate of 0.05, the possibility of success and targeted society with a number of 2000 individuals, the number of samples needed for the study was 322 individuals. In order to collect the data, the standard questionnaire was used. The two questionnaires used in this study, had a total of 30 questions. Questions 1 to 15 of the first questionnaire were to measure job characteristics and questions 16 to 30 were for career plateau in the career path. In order to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, a prototype that contains 25 questionnaires was pre-tested then using the data obtained from the questionnaire the amount of confidence coefficient was measured using the SPSS software by which Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale of job characteristics was determined 0.89 and for the scale of career plateau was determined 86/0 respectively. In total, obtained alpha is higher than 0.7 indicating that the questionnaire used had the necessary reliability.

Research findings

In this section, first, descriptive statistics were used to determine the characteristics of statistical population then the hypotheses were tested using Pearson's correlation coefficient and regression analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

The results from the demographic data of respondents in terms of sex are: 59.9 percent of the respondents were male, 40.1 percent of the respondents were female; in terms of education 9.3 percent had associate degree or lower, 56.8 percent had BA degree and 33.9 percent had MA degree; in terms of age 15.2 percent of respondents were younger than 30 years, 55.3 percent were between 31 to 40 years and 29.5 percent were older than 40 years. Distribution of respondents' working experience is as follows: 20.2 percent less than 5 years, 24.8 percent between 6 to 10 years, 28 percent between 11 to 15 years and 27 percent more than 15 years.

Inferential statistics

In order to evaluate the relationship between independent and dependent variables and hypotheses of the study, using the software SPSS, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used that the results of the tests and correlation coefficient between each variable in the diagnosis of 5% error and confidence of 95% were shown in table (1).

Table 1: Results of Pearson correlation coefficient

Hypotheses	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Sig	Test Results
Main	job characteristics	Human resources plateau	0.45	0.000	Confirmed
H1	Lack of variety of skills	Human resources plateau	0.44	0.000	Confirmed
H2	Low job identity	Human resources plateau	0.15	0.000	Confirmed
H3	Concept of job	Human resources plateau	0.78	0.000	Confirmed
H4	Lack of independence	Human resources plateau	0.38	0.000	Confirmed
H5	Lack of feedback	Human resources plateau	0.75	0.000	Confirmed

As Table 1 shows, the result of Pearson correlation coefficient test about all hypotheses is significant in the diagnosis level of 0.05, which means the null hypothesis is rejected statistically and with the possibility of 95% these hypotheses are confirmed. Table 2 contains a regression analysis of variance to assess the certainty of a linear relationship between the two variables. Statistical hypothesis of the significance of all regression model tests is as follows:

$$\begin{cases} H_0: \beta_0=0 & \text{Sig.} \geq 0.05 \text{ there is no linear relationships.} \\ H_1: \beta_0 \neq 0 & \text{Sig.} < 0.05 \text{ there is linear relationships.} \end{cases}$$

In fact null hypothesis states that all regression coefficients are zero, in other words:

$$H_0 : \beta_1=0$$

H1: Independent variable coefficient is contrasting zero

Table 2: Results of ANOVA test

Model	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean of squares	F statistic	Significant level
Regression	165.68	1	165.68	-----	-----
Residual	3562.24	320	11.13	14.88	0.000
Total	3727.92	321	-----	----	----

In Table 2, Sig = 0.000 and less than 5% for both equations (P- value < 0.05), therefore, the hypothesis of a linear relationship between a dependent variable and independent variables is confirmed. In table 3, column B, Beta was presented in order of fixed amount and the coefficient of independent variables. The coefficients table includes both Beta standardized and unstandardized coefficients. In the standardized coefficients, the scale of variables is not the same while in beta standardized coefficients the scale of variables are the same it is possible to compare the variables. Therefore to compare the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, standardized coefficients are used.

Table 3: Coefficients results of the main hypothesis test

Model	Standardized coefficient	Unstandardized coefficient		T-statistics	Significant level
	Beta coefficient	Standard error	B		
fixed		0.73	26.37	35.99	0.000
Job characteristics	0.21	0.02	0.10	3.85	0.000
Lack of skill variety	0.44	0.09	0.85	8.86	0.000
Low job identity	0.23	0.02	0.11	4.24	0.000
Concept of work	0.78	0.03	0.75	22.37	0.000
Lack of independence	0.25	0.02	0.21	2.72	0.000
Lack of feedback	0.75	0.04	0.87	20.68	0.000

Based on the results of the above table, in any regression equation according to the sig of independent variables, it is possible to determine their significance in the model; therefore the hypotheses mentioned in the study can be responded. In table 3, the absolute big t-value and small p-value indicates that the independent variable of job characteristics and its components have significance effects on the dependent variable of human resources plateau.

Discussion and conclusion

As it was seen, based on the results obtained from analyzing the data of the study about the hypotheses, at the confidence level of 95% the impact of job characteristics and its components on human resources plateau is supported by data and research claim is approved; therefore job characteristics has positive and significant impact on human resources plateau. In the main hypothesis it was said that job characteristics has positive and significant impact on human resources plateau that are consistent with the results of the study carried out by Vahedi et al (2014). In a similar study Salehi and Ali Poor (2010) found similar results. The results of the study by Vakili et al (2009) and Faraji et al (2008) are also consistent with the results of the results of the present study. The results of the present study are also in line with the results of the study carried out by Booterchi (2013), Rotendo and Peru (2013), Oscar (2012) and Taylor and Parker (2012) who found the same results. Based on the findings of this study and previous research findings the following suggestions are presented as follow:

- Creating a skill variety in the tasks assigned and the roles of the staff of education system of Masjed Soleiman are as follow:
 - Creating sophisticated skills through workshops.
 - Holding different training courses and material and moral encouragement for staff to participate in these courses and learn the necessary skills.
 - Assigning important and specialized responsibilities to staff to perform various tasks.

Developing and explaining the identity of the work for the staff of education system of Masjed Soleiman identity described as follows:

- Having the procedure and the possibility of exercising its staff structured
- Possibility to start and finish work in different parts of the job by the staff
- The job is only a small part of the total activities of the organization

Making the job important for the staff of education system of Masjed Soleiman described as follows:

- Influencing the jobs by reflecting the good performance of other staff
- Describing significant impacts of the results of performing jobs on the staffs' lives and welfare
- Respecting the staffs and promoting the value and their job position in the organization and the community

Giving independence and freedom in action to the staffs of education system of Masjed Soleiman described as follows:

- Creating opportunities in jobs in order to use personal judgment and creativity
- Creating independence and freedom in action to select the way to do the job
- Creating the possibility of decision-making regarding the requirements of doing the job

Giving the feedback of their performance to the staffs of education system of Masjed Soleiman described as follows:

- Creating the possibility to understand the way by which the job was done or describing it exactly
- Providing guidelines in jobs to do them well

- Providing valuable guidelines in jobs to do the jobs well and lack of needs to get feedback from colleagues or administrators

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